

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 191210Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC 3512

INFO SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

COMIDEASTFOR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAMA 1408

EXDIS MILITARY ADDEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE FOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : PFOR, MARR, MASS, BA, US

SUBJECT : SHAIKH HAMAD SAYS BAHRAIN WANTS FIGHTER SQUADRON IN
EXCHANGE FOR LASALLE STAYING IN BAHRAIN

REF : A.) MANAMA 1377 B.) STATE 226568

1. I WAS SUMMONED TO SEE SHAIKH HAMAD BIN ISA AL KHALIFA (HEIR APARENT/MINISTER OF DEFENSE AND ACTING PRIME MINISTER OF BAHRAIN) AFTERNOON OF SEPT. 18. HAMAD, JUST BACK FROM THE FARNBOROUGH AIR SHOW, WAS FULL OF SPECIFICS ABOUT THE NEEDS OF THE BAHRAIN DEFENSE FORCE IN ITS 'MODERNIZATION' PROGRAM. HE ASKED ABOUT MY SEPT. 14 MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER (REF A) AND I SUMMARIZED IT FOR HIM, INCLUDING MY COMMENT THAT I WAS UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO TRY TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER THE GOB HAD SPECIFIC ITEMS IN MIND WHEN IT SPOKE OF MODERNIZATION. I SAID THAT SHAIKH KHALIFA HAD REFERRED ME TO HIM ON THAT MATTER. HAMAD INTERJECTED THAT THAT WAS EXACTLY WHY HE HAD CALLED ME TO HIS OFFICE. WHAT FOLLOWS TRANSPIRED IN A FORTY-MINUTE CONVERSATION, IN A CONTEXT OF HUMOR AND FRIENDSHIP (JUST AS THE MEETING WITH SHAIKH KHALIFA HAD TAKEN PLACE IN A CONTEXT OF EMOTION AND FRUSTRATION AKIN TO ANGER).

2. HAMAD ASKED ME TO "SIT BACK, SO YOU WON'T FAINT"; PROTESTED THAT HE DIDN'T WANT TO "SHOCK" ME. I SAT BACK, BUT KEPT SIPPING THE HEAVILY SUGARED TEA (HAMAD IS NOT FASTING "BECAUSE OF THE STRAIN OF WORK"). "I WANTED YOU TO KNOW WE HAVE CHANGED OUR
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PRIORITIES FOR OUR PLANNED AIR WING", HE BEGAN. "WE WANT FIGHTERS

NOT HELICOPTERS". HE STATED THAT IT HAD BEEN DECIDED THAT HELICOPTERS WERE SO EXPENSIVE AND SO DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN THAT THERE WAS LITTLE QUALITATIVE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HAVING A HELICOPTER FORCE AND HAVING FIGHTERS. I INTERJECTED, LITTLE DIFFERENCE FROM SOME VIEWPOINTS; FROM OTHER VIEWPOINTS, THERE IS WORLD OF DIFFERENCE. "EXACTLY", AGREED HAMAD.

3. HAMAD NOTED THAT QATAR AND KUWAIT HAVE F-1'S; SAUDI ARABIA AND ISRAEL HAVE F-15'S; ABU DHABI HAS MIRAGES; ONLY BAHRAIN HAS "NOTHING". THERE IS THUS A "VACUUM" IN BAHRAIN (WHICH WILL BE "ENLARGED" WITH THE DEPARTURE OF THE MIDDLE EAST FORCE NEXT SUMMER). NEIGHBORS, IN THE CONTEXT OF GULF SECURITY, WILL WANT TO FILL THE VACUUM, SAID HAMAD. BAHRAIN WILL NOT BE ABLE TO DECLINE THEIR REQUESTS TO USE BAHRAIN AS A BASE UNLESS IT HAS ITS OWN FORCE AND CAN SAY THAT IT DEFENDS/PATROLS ITS OWN SKIES AND WATERS. "AND BY THE WAY", HE THREW IN, "WE HAVE DECIDED TO CREATE A SEA FORCE AT THE SAME TIME WE CREATE OUR AIR WING; AND BOTH MUST BE MODERN". AND NEIGHBORS ONCE THEY USE BAHRAIN WILL NEVER LEAVE; "OUR NEIGHBORS, EVEN THE SAUDIS, ARE NOT GENTLEMEN LIKE YOU; ONCE HERE THEY WILL NEVER LEAVE". "IMAGINE IF IRAQ WANTS TO USE US AS A BASE* AND ISN'T IT AWFUL WHAT THEY ARE DOING TO OUR COUSINS IN KUWAIT?" I OBSERVED THAT I DIDN'T REALLY FOLLOW. BAHRAIN SURELY COULD SIMPLY DECLINE TO ALLOW ITSELF TO BE USED AS A BASE BY EVEN ITS CLOSE NEIGHBORS. "VERY DIFFICULT", SAID HAMAD.

4. "SO", HE CONTINUED, "WE WANT TO KNOW WHETHER YOU WILL ALLOW AN EXPORT LICENSE FOR US TO BUY F-5'S. WE WANT INFORMATION ON F-5B, E AND F'S. AND IN THE FUTURE, WE WILL WANT INFORMATION ON F-16'S." HAMAD CONTINUED THAT THE BDF WOULD LIKE TO CREATE ITS AIR WING OVER THE NEXT FIVE TO SEVEN YEAR PERIOD; THAT THE FIGHTER SQUADRON WOULD CONSIST OF FOURTEEN OR SO PLANES. TWO OR THREE "TRAINERS" WILL BE ENOUGH AT FIRST. PURCHASES WOULD BE LESS THAN \$25 MILLION EACH YEAR.

5. HE ALLOWED AS TO HOW THEY WERE STILL INTERESTED IN HELICOPTERS -- BOTH THE BELL 212 ("WHICH YOUR TEAM WILL OBVIOUSLY RECOMMEND") AND THE NEW UTTAS. HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT TOP PRIORITY WAS DEFINITELY ON THE FIGHTER SQUADRON. HE RECALLED THAT A HELICOPTER HAD LANDED ONCE ON THE WHITE HOUSE LAWN. "WE ARE CONCERNED THAT THAT NOT HAPPEN HERE", HE ADDED. FIGHTERS ARE LESS OF A PROBLEM IN THAT

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REGARD THAN HELICOPTERS, HE ADDED.

6. SHAIKH HAMAD THEN ADDED, AFTER SUGGESTING THAT I NOTE EVERYTHING DOWN, THAT HE ALSO WONDERED WHETHER BAHRAIN COULD BUY STINGERS ("GROUND-TO-AIR MISSILES WHICH ARE SHOULDER-HELD" HE EXPLAINED TO ME). "ASK ABOUT THAT TOO".

7. WHATEVER WE BUY, HE REINTERATED, IT WILL BE LESS THAN \$25

MILLION EACH YEAR "SO YOU WON'T NEED TO GO TO THE CONGRESS". I INTERJECTED THAT THERE WAS AN ARMS POLICY TO BE CONSIDERED WHICH WAS AN EXECUTIVE POLICY NOT DEPENDENT ON THE CONGRESS; ALTHOUGH CONGRESS TOO HAD ITS OWN CONCERNS ABOUT ARMS IN THE GULF REGION; AS INDEED SO DID MOST THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE.

8. "THOUGHTFUL PEOPLE HERE", HE PICKED UP THE ARGUMENT, "ARE LOOKING FOR CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF US-BAHRAINI COOPERATION". WE IN THE GOVERNMENT ARE LOOKING FOR EXAMPLES TO SHOW THE "SMALL PEOPLE" WHO SEE AMERICA AS IMPERIALISTIC AND ANTI-ARAB, OF YOUR HELPFULNESS. WE WANT TO COOPERATE IN SCIENTIFIC, TECHNICAL, HEALTH AND ENGINEERING FIELDS, BUT MOST "VISIBLE" OF ALL IS THE "MILITARY FIELD". HAMAD ADDED THAT HE WAS NOT TALKING ONLY AS MINISTER OF DEFENSE, BUT AS HEIR APPARENT WHO WAS VITALLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE REGION. WITH CLOSE US-BAHRAINI COOPERATION, HE EXPANDED, WE COULD SEE TO IT THAT EVEN IF THE WHOLE REGION WENT COMMUNIST, THIS ISLAND WOULD STAY A NON-COMMUNIST FRIEND. I COMMENTED THAT WE CERTAINLY WANTED THE REGION TO REMAIN STABLE; THAT WE FULLY RECIPROCATED BAHRAIN'S DESIRE FOR A BROADER RELATIONSHIP--THAT HE KNEW ABOUT THE RECENT TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AGREEMENT, ABOUT THE LARGELY INCREASED PEACE CORPS EFFORTS IN HOUSING, HEALTH, MAN-POWER TRAINING, ETC. HE READILY AGREED BUT ADDED THAT THOSE THINGS TAKE YEARS TO SHOW RESULTS; "TWO OR THREE FIGHTERS WOULD BE VERY VISIBLE IMMEDIATELY". THEY WILL ALSO ALLOW ME TO TELL MY YOUNG LIEUTENANTS THAT THE US IS AN IMPORTANT FRIEND. "WE WANT TO CREATE THE SITUATION WHERE IF ONE OF MY LIEUTENANTS TRIES TO SEIZE POWER, THAT THE PEOPLE WILL PUT HIM DOWN -- NOT JUST OUR DEFENSE FORCES OR POLICE. SO WE AS A GOVERNMENT ARE WORKING HARD ON HOUSING, INFLATION, EDUCATION, HEALTH -- ALL THESE FIELDS; BUT FOR OUR PRESTIGE WE MUST HAVE A VIABLE MILITARY FORCE AS WELL.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAMA 1408

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9. PLEASE TELL THEM, HE CONTINUED, THAT IF THE TIMING FOR SHAIKH KHALIFA'S VISIT NOW ISN'T GOOD "WHAT WITH THE ELECTION AND SECRETARY KISSINGER'S AFRICAN TRIP", THAT "I THINK I SHOULD COME TO WASHINGTON IN JANUARY OR FEBRUARY TO TALK WITH THE PENTAGON". "BUT WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW NOW IS WHETHER YOU WILL GIVE US THE EXPORT LICENSE. IF THE ANSWER IS YES, THEN NO ONE HERE CAN CRITICIZE US FOR ALLOWING THE (U.S.S.) LASALLE TO STAY HERE. WE DON'T WANT THE (US) NAVY TO GO BECAUSE THAT WOULD CREATE A VACUUM; BUT WE MUST HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW FOR IT."

10. CITING THE VALUE OF OVERALL US-BAHRAINI RELATIONS AS SEEN BY BAHRAIN, HAMAD HASTENED TO ADD THAT EVEN IF THE ANSWER WERE NO ON THE EXPORT LICENSE FOR FIGHTERS, "THAT WOULD NOT MEAN AN END TO OUR RELATIONS". "WE ARE STUCK WITH EACH OTHER", HE LAUGHED, "FOR BETTER OR WORSE".

11. BUT TELL THEM THAT I'M DELAYING NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE FRENCH AND THE BRITISH FOR A FEW WEEKS ONLY TO WAIT FOR YOUR REPLY. ("THEY'VE OFFERED US F-1'S, JAGUARS, EVERYTHING"). CAN I HAVE A DEFINITE ANSWER IN TWO WEEKS? I SAID I THOUGHT NOT, THAT FRANKLY THE INJECTION OF A REQUEST FOR THE F-5'S WOULD SERIOUSLY COMPLICATE THE QUESTION OF OUR CONSIDERATION OF THE "MODERNIZATION" OF THE BDF; THAT WE HAD BEEN LEAD TO BELIEVE, BY HIM AMONG OTHERS, THAT THEY WERE THINKING OF ONLY A HELICOPTER FORCE FOR THE TIME BEING. HIS YOUNG FACE CLOUDED SLIGHTLY AND HE ALLOWED AS TO BE SORRY FOR "THE CHANGE IN SIGNALS"; BUT, HE ADDED, "THIS IS THE REAL THING; CONFIDENTIAL

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NOT THE HELICOPTERS".

12. COMMENTS FOLLOW SEPTTEL.
BURLEIGH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: NAVAL FORCES, FIGHTER AIRCRAFT, MILITARY BASES, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976MANAMA01408
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760354-0718
From: MANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760944/aaaablsb.tel
Line Count: 209
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 76 MANAMA 1377, 76 STATE 226568
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <16 JUN 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SHAIKH HAMAD SAYS BAHRAIN WANTS FIGHTER SQUADRON IN EXCHANGE FOR LASALLE STAYING IN BAHRAIN
TAGS: PFOR, MARR, MASS, BA, US, (KHALIFA, ISA IBN SALMAN AL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006